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INFO WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000917

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: First Lady Prepares Controversial Bid for Presidency

REF: A. GUATEMALA 254; B. GUATEMALA 009; C. 2008 GUATEMALA 1573 D. 2008 GUATEMALA 1017

CLASSIFIED BY: Drew G. Blakeney, Political and Economic Counselor, State, P/E; REASON: 1.4B, D

Summary

1. (C) Although she has not publicly stated her intentions, it is clear that First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom intends to run for the Guatemal Election

2. (C) Although she has not publicly declared her intention, several Embassy contacts have reported that First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom has

3. (C) With the Guatemalan economy buffeted by the global downturn and security continuing to deteriorate, President Colom regularly points to

4. (U) Torres de Colom is best known to the public for the Council's flagship Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Program, "My Family Progresses" 010. This dramatic expansion so far has been funded largely by transfers from other government programs, including the Ministries of Health, E

5. (U) Critics point out that the Guatemalan CCT omits transparency and accountability controls found in other such programs in Latin America.

6. (U) There is some element of sexism and classism in the upper and middle classes' opposition to Torres. Guatemala is a conservative society

7. (U) "My Family Progresses" is not the First Lady's only program that has become popular with the poor. Other Social Cohesion Council progr ing Program (subsidized cafeteria meals). According to Social Cohesion Council data, 26,500 families benefited from the Food Assistance Program

But an Abrasive Personality

8. (C) Sandra Torres de Colom's assertive personality does not sit well with everyone in male-dominated Guatemalan society. According to Presi

9. (C) Torres de Colom is widely suspected to have been behind the ouster of presidential security director Carlos Quintanilla (ref b), and in

10. (U) Article 186 of the Constitution prohibits the president's relatives "within four degrees of consanguinity and second-degree in-laws" f

11. (C) Nonetheless, several elements work in Torres' favor. A new Constitutional Court likely to be sympathetic to the governing UNE party wi

The Evolving Electoral Landscape

12. (C) At this early stage, it appears that the two principal presidential contenders in November 2011 will be rightist General Otto Perez Mc

13. (C) Recent presidential elections have tended to favor the previous runner-up. Perez Molina finished second to Colom in 2007. A poll of ur

14. (C) The extent to which the MDF congressional finance scandal will sully Perez Molina is not yet clear, but it is something he will have to

15. (C) (Biographic Note: Sandra Julieta Torres Casanova de Colom was born Oct. 15, 1959, in Melchor de Mencos, Peten Department, Guatemala, c

Comment

16. (C) Much will change between now and Fall 2011, but different parties' plans for that distant event are already taking shape and impactin